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## The Importance of Local Area as a Motivation for Cooperation Among Rural Tourism Entrepreneurs

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**The importance of local area as a motivation for  
cooperation among rural tourism entrepreneurs**

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## **The importance of local area as a motivation for cooperation among rural tourism entrepreneurs**

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the issue of entrepreneurial motivations among rural tourism entrepreneurs in choosing to engage in cooperation. It analyzes literature which deals with the role of entrepreneurs and the development of rural destinations and highlights the fact that the role of entrepreneurs has been understated. Using mixed research methods and studying two rural areas in Ireland it addresses research questions such as why do rural tourism entrepreneurs engage in cooperation? How did this cooperation emerge? And how do they choose who to co-operate with?

The key finding is that while these entrepreneurs are motivated to co-operate as they think it will have a positive impact on their business, for many a key motivation is the impact that there will be on their area. As such it is concluded that we need to be cognisant of the fact that rural tourism entrepreneurs are motivated not just by profit and individual gain and that the local area is also an important motivator.

Key words: entrepreneurs, rural destination development, Westport Ireland, entrepreneurial motives, local area

Rural areas are undergoing significant change with many rural communities finding it increasingly difficult to sustain themselves in light of a decline in agricultural production and the need for many to move to urban areas to find employment. As Saxena et al 2007, p.348) note rural communities are being encouraged to 'incorporate new sources of income as complements to rather than substitutes for existing activities' and as such rural tourism has been identified as an opportunity for many. But with economic recession and increasingly demanding tourists who have many destinations to choose from, the pressure to innovate and improve the attractiveness of the area in the mind of the tourist is constant. This paper is particularly focused on the role of entrepreneurs in terms of rural tourism development. It argues that the literature has consistently understated the importance of these key stakeholders in terms of the development of rural destinations (Koh, and Hatten, 2002) and it also delves into the key issues of what roles these entrepreneurs can play by co-operating to enhance destination competitiveness, tourist experience and ultimately economic and social sustainability. Often such actions involve working with other entrepreneurs or other stakeholders. The key question that the research addresses is what motivates entrepreneurs to act in ways that are good for the community or destination as a whole but may only have a limited impact on their own business, and in fact may benefit their competitors as much as themselves. Does this make them fundamentally different to the traditional view of entrepreneurs as being motivated by profit and their own success? How does such cooperation emerge? How do rural tourism entrepreneurs decide who to cooperate with locally? These issues are studied using research conducted in Connemara and Westport /Clew Bay in the West of Ireland.

## **1. Literature Review**

Butler's model of tourism destination development (1980) shows the cycle that many destinations develop through but over the years the literature has contended a number of the key components of the model. For example the assertion that local control on tourism decreases over time and that local entrepreneurs only influence the destination in the early stages of development and that it is multinational tourism enterprises which drive later development of the destination is unlikely to be a reality for many small rural tourism areas (Ryan, 2009). Factors such as transport, infrastructure and natural resources are highlighted as explaining the development of destinations but the importance of tourism entrepreneurs in this regard has been neglected by many, as Koh and Hatten (2002, p.21) state they are 'the overlooked player in tourism development studies'. However Koh and Hatten (2002), Russell and Faulkner (1999, 2004) and Komppula (2014) have analyzed the key role that entrepreneurs have in transforming the resources of a place into tourist attractions. Ryan et al (2012, p.1) show that the influence of entrepreneurs can be 'dynamic and creative, and has the ability to influence the creation of a culture for tourism that underpins tourism development over long periods of time'.

While the role of entrepreneurs may have been understated in discussions of destination development, the idea that destinations develop through phases is a vital observation. However as noted by Hovinen (2002, p.209) a clear difficulty is the 'lack of accurate trend data for many destinations' which makes it difficult for destinations to identify these phases. Linked to the issue of destination development is that of destination competitiveness, and the work of Ritchie and Crouch (2003) has played an important role in progressing the work of earlier authors such as Chon, Weaver and Kim (1991) and Hu and Ritchie (1993). The key focus here is to be able to measure the competitiveness of destinations and the model they developed identifies 36 key factors. Enterprise, and actions of entrepreneurs, is identified as a key supporting factor which acts as a springboard for tourism

development. The importance of entrepreneurs in terms of competitiveness is apparent, as Ritchie and Crouch (2003) say 'the extent to which tourism development advances economic prosperity and the quality of life of residents depends significantly upon the actions and success of ... entrepreneurial firms' (2003 p.28). On the basis of research with a panel of experts Crouch (2007) refines this to identify the ten most critical factors and they include climate, culture and history, tourism superstructure, image, cost/value and infrastructure. Enterprise or entrepreneurs are not specifically mentioned in this list but are discussed as playing a key supporting role.

In some ways what both the literature on destination development and destination competitiveness have in common is that they treat the destination almost as an innate object, but the reality is that rural destinations are made up of a myriad of individuals who are connected to each other in disparate ways. They have differing opinions, interests and agendas but share the same space and the desire for this place to remain economically and socially sustainable so that they and their families can continue to live there. The stakeholders in rural tourism are many, including those involved in public office, local government officials, business associations, entrepreneurs, tourists, and communities. And sometimes external bodies can also play a role, for example in the case of tour operators.. Each may have different perspectives or priorities but in many cases they share a similar ultimate goal that they want the destination to grow and often their collaboration can result in important innovations which allow this to happen. It is notable though that all may not have the same view regarding the way that the destination should develop or the strategies that should be implemented in order to achieve this goal. According to Beritelli (2011, p.607) 'cooperation plays a central role for tourism destination communities'. But what or who is it that instigates and sustains this collaboration? Tourism, unlike any other sector is like a web of dependency whereby the final product that the tourist experiences in the rural area is made up of components which are provided by a variety of different actors. It is this that necessitates cooperation and collaboration among rural tourism stakeholders to ensure that the rural tourism experience results in a repeat visit or a recommendation to a future potential visitor.

So having ascertained the necessity of cooperation in rural tourism areas it is important to think about how this works in practice. There have been a number of papers which have examined how cooperation works, for example Hall (2004) highlights the importance of cooperation in the development of the wine tourism industry and Morrisson et al (2004) discuss the factors that led to the successful operation of tourism networks. Ewen et al (2007) broaden the debate of cooperation into studying clusters and Erkus-Ozturk and Eraydin (2012) re-direct the cluster discussion to looking at global connectivity. Ziakos and Costa (2010) note the importance of assessing the status and patterns of collaborating networks in order to identify the different types of links between organizations and where ties need to be strengthened. Saxena et al (2007) introduce the notion of integrated rural tourism which focuses on linkages between tourism, resources, activities, products and communities. An important consideration is also the nature of the relationships within a community or local place and the fact that these linkages can be 'soft' or 'hard' (Saxena et al, 2007), formal or informal (Petrout et al, 2007) (), weak or strong (Granovetter, 1973) and often rely on the social norms and personal connections of individuals (Saxena, 2007) and as Petrout et al (2007, p.436) state 'whether to network is as much as social as an economic decision. The important role institutions can have in these networks is also observed by Cawley et al (2007) and Conway and Cawley (2012). ,

Kylanen and Mariani (2012) highlight the importance of coopetition, the simultaneous cooperation and competition in tourism businesses and discuss examples where 'businesses tend to cooperate in the medium-long term in order to achieve a successful long-term destination branding strategy while

they compete on a shorter term for the hearts, minds and wallets of the customers' (p.62). What is clear is that collaboration in tourism destinations is fundamental (Gursoy et al, 2014) and while the drivers or triggers for such cooperation may be varied (see Gorman and Mottiar, 2014 and Estevez 2014 for example) the positive outcomes are what encourages the development of such relationships. As a result of this sometimes this cooperation is encouraged and supported by local government and institutions (Cawley et al 2007) and tour operators and destination marketing organizations can also play important roles (Ilvery et al, 2007). An important part of this discussion is that in the integrated rural tourism concept 'networks are place specific' (Barcus, 2013, p.131). This focus on place is important and relevant for the discussion below which is particularly interested in individual entrepreneurs.

In general entrepreneurs are seen to be motivated by profits and the desire to be successful but this is not always the case. Morrison et al (1999) describe different types of entrepreneurs including ethnic entrepreneurs, female entrepreneurs and lifestyle entrepreneurs. In the case of lifestyle entrepreneurs quite an extensive literature (e.g. Shaw and Williams, 2004, Atlejevic and Doorne, 2000, Kompulla, 2004, Mottiar, 2007, Skokoc and Morrison, 2011) has developed around investigating the fact that these entrepreneurs are motivated not just by profits but by a way of life.

Bosworth and Farrell (2011, p.91) highlight the fact that rural entrepreneurs are embedded in their local areas and that 'moving away from a single-minded view of profit-driven entrepreneurship brings the important features of networks, community and embeddedness more centrally into our understanding of a tourism entrepreneur'. They also note that 'in understanding the critical moments that spark entrepreneurial behavior, the social situation is often critical' (p.1486). This idea of embeddedness is developed from the work of Granovetter (1973) who explains that decisions that individuals make are not just influenced by economics but also social relations and often networks are built around local relationships and knowledge and they are place based. . Mottiar and Ryan (2006) use industrial district theory and show the importance of a social milieu whereby communities are bound together by a common identity and how this can influence and explain tourism destination success. Similarly Hallak et al (2012) investigate the importance of place identity for entrepreneurs and show that 'place identity had a positive effect on entrepreneurial self-efficacy'. Furthermore Atlejevic and Doorne (2003, p.143) note that 'the intergenerational nature of tourism business requires that the conceptualization of entrepreneurship move beyond its traditional focus on new business development, but also incorporate strategic considerations, which seek to express values of continuity, stability and entrenchment'. Skokoc and Morrison (2011) also note how the environment in which businesses are located can influence the way in which they operate and in particular they highlight the differing attitudes of entrepreneurs located in transition economies. Tucker (2010) observes peasant entrepreneurs and notes how socio-cultural factors can influence tourism entrepreneurship. And Kline and Miliburn (2010) suggest ways in which communities can create an environment in which rural tourism can flourish. What this shows is the differences that there can be between destinations and the impact that this can have on individual entrepreneurs and thus on the way the destination operates and develops.

As the discussion above shows motivations can involve more than simply profits, and that the environment and social factors can also have a significant impact on entrepreneurs and their strategies. The focus for this paper is not to classify, the type of entrepreneurs in the study but in light of our understanding that there can be different motivations for entrepreneurs the research question is what motivates rural entrepreneurs to co-operate with others in the destination, is it simply to increase profits or are other motives at play?

## **2. Research Methodology**

This research is part of a bigger research project which investigated cross sectoral cooperation between tourism and the cultural sector in a number of different areas in the West of Ireland. This paper is focusing on the data collected from rural tourism entrepreneurs in two areas: Connemara and Westport and Clew Bay and in particular focuses on examples of cooperation that have taken place in Westport. These two rural areas are small but important tourism destinations in the West of Ireland. They are examples of areas that continue to attract tourists in spite of, or perhaps because of their relative remoteness, and both have a history of dependence on tourism. The areas comprise of rural areas with small towns/villages in which local businesses operate, Westport has a population of 16,892 while 39,238 people live in the area of Connemara (CSO, 2011). In particular in Westport there is a history of cooperation with the community for example being very involved in the Tidy Towns competition and the development of Destination Westport by a group of hoteliers to market the town to potential tourists. Furthermore this town has earned a reputation as an attractive place to visit and work, winning the Fáilte Ireland national large tourism town award in 2014 (Gleeson, 2015) and the Irish Times award as the best place to live in 2012 (Goodman, 2012). As it 'attracts many artists and craft businesses [it is also] quite a cosmopolitan type of place with people of many nationalities living here' (Mottiar, 2007, p. 10). Westport/Clew Bay and Connemara are identifiable geographic areas, and destinations, and so questions relating to local place and local businesses were easily understood by participants. Both are relatively small rural areas and it is noted that this may mean that place attachment and identification of the area as a factor in decisions may be more pronounced than in a larger, or more urban, settings.

In the first instance interviews were conducted with a number of key informants in the destinations. Interview respondents were selected using both purposeful and snowball sampling, enabling the researchers to locate information rich key informants (Patton, 2002). In total 25 interviews were conducted. These took the form of 'guided conversations' (Johns & Lee-Ross, 1998) and were recorded and typically lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. They were subsequently transcribed and thematically coded..

In order to get a picture of the extent of cooperation and the nature of the types of cooperation that is occurring quantitative methods were relied on in the form of a questionnaire. The Fáilte Ireland (national tourism authority) database was used to send the survey to all tourism entrepreneurs in the area in May 2012 and after two reminders 65 responses were received representing approximately a 7% response rate. While this is a low response rate, analysis of the data shows a range of entrepreneurial activities including accommodation, tourist attractions, special interest providers and restaurants are included. There is also a broad geographical spread and range in terms of age and size of the businesses although it is notable that 66% of the businesses are in existence for more than 10 years and 50% employ 2-4 people.

On the basis of these two methods of data collection seven projects and schemes which are based on cooperation in the destinations were identified through interviews and surveys and these were explored in more detail through both primary and secondary research. This paper discusses two such projects in Westport; Destination Westport and the Greenway. The layers of detailed discussion with informants and analysis of responses to open questions in the survey combined with exploring cases where cooperation is currently operating provides an insight into the nature and motivation for cooperation among rural tourism entrepreneurs.

### **3. Findings**

#### ***3.1 To what extent, and in what ways, do these entrepreneurs co-operate?***

Of the 65 survey respondents 72 percent of them engage in cooperation. The ways in which they co-operate are shown in figure 1 below and the high levels of cooperation in terms of sharing information and ideas and offering and receiving help and advice are notable. These are examples of informal cooperation and rely primarily on strong personal relationships which mean that individuals are willing to exchange ideas, information and knowledge. Relatively high levels of cooperation in terms of joint marketing and service product development are also important as they indicate the bundling of products and creating of new products and services both of which are important for the development of the destination.

(Insert Fig 1 approximately here)

When asked to describe the ways in which they cooperate entrepreneurs highlight a wide range of activities, from having links on websites, establishing new activities/ventures together, bundling products to develop packages for tourists (such as walking weekends, a craft trail and accommodation and activity packages), or recommending guests to use local businesses. This sample is small so it is not possible to conduct any statistical analysis but it is observable there is a high incidence of older businesses in the category who did not engage in cooperation. 81% of those who did not engage in cooperation were businesses which are in existence for more than 10 years. When asked had they cooperated in past only 24% of this group had and when asked why they didn't cooperate there is no trend in terms of the reasons, although the most common response (cited by 33% of this group) was 'I am not sure that I would benefit' followed by 'I do not know how to go about cooperating with others' (cited by 24% of the group).

#### **3.2 Why do these entrepreneurs engage in cooperation?**

The key issue of concern for this research is what motivates these entrepreneurs to engage in such cooperation. As the chart below shows the most important reason for cooperating with other individuals or organizations chosen by respondents is to increase visitors and to raise profile and gain exposure. It is interesting to note that increasing profits is the fifth most important factor, although of course it is assumed that increasing visitors and raising profile will ultimately result in increasing profits.

(Insert figure 2 approximately here)

While most of the reasons why rural entrepreneurs engage in cooperation are to do with improving their own businesses, a key finding is that the third most recorded reason is to 'help the development of my local area'.



Destination Westport provides a good example of such cooperation. This was established by ten hotels in Westport in 2006 in a bid to market Westport as a destination to international tourists. With the emergence of regular flights from Knock, a local regional airport, to Birmingham it was recognized that there was potential to market to this city specifically. A number of the hoteliers in the town met and between them they invested approximately €12,000 to market Westport to Birmingham. This was the first step and resulted in the development of a 'view [of] what we could do collectively as a marketing group and how we could sort of brand Westport' (interviewee D). The decision was then made that each hotelier should contribute a set price per bedroom and they raised approximately €100,000, this was then matched by funding from Fáilte Ireland (the national tourism authority) who was operating a matching funding scheme. Although this matched funding is no longer available Destination Westport continues to market the area and has now expanded its membership to include activity providers, B&Bs and restaurants - in the words of one member 'we've spread our wings a bit to try and take in more people' (interviewee P)

When asked, one of the participants says 'have we got return on our investment, I don't think so yet. But the thing with Westport is ... the people in the hotels, and the majority of people out there.. are owner operators. So.. it's an investment in the future. And we see it as a long term vision that tourism and the product will probably outlive us into our children' (interviewee D). This shows the focus not just on the immediate success of the business and a return on an investment, but on the destination and the long term sustainability of the business and area. It reflects the comments above by Atlejevic and Doorne (2003) and Kylanen and Mariani (2012) that intergenerational tourism businesses often have a longer term perspective. It is this that makes cooperating with competitors and being part of Destination Westport a good strategy for these entrepreneurs. It is also notable that while originally Destination Westport only included specific larger hotels who were invited to join the group, over time this has changed and there is a deliberate effort to include other providers in the area making it more inclusive and broad ranging.

### **3.3 How do rural tourism entrepreneurs decide who to cooperate with?**

A key decision for an entrepreneur engaging in cooperation is who to work with. As Beritelli (2011, p.613) discusses 'informal relation-based cooperation emphasizes mutual trust and personal commitment'. Czernek (2013, p.97) shows that 'day to day cooperation between single entities was possible when it was built on knowledge-based trust... but the highest level of trust could only be achieved after years of working together'... This type of trust is evident in this research where as one respondent stated 'we have to work together for the good of our local area'. This focus on local area means that they particularly choose to cooperate with others in the area rather than those located in other towns or areas and this enhances the knowledge based trust that exists. Also as noted above they recognize that the impacts of such strategies may not be realized by this generation, it is clear that their decision of who to cooperate with is being motivated not just by the benefits it may bring to their business but also by the impact it will have on the local area.

(Insert Figure 3 approximately here)

This is reflected in the case of Destination Westport as described above, it also reflects perspectives on who their competitors are, as one entrepreneur (hotelier, interviewee D) said 'they [local business with the same offering] are not my competition you know.. they're not. I mean the guys in Killarney

are my competition, the guys in Galway, but I mean if we can get people to town.. So I mean I love to see it full...because then I can use it'.. Another said, 'I'd be happy to promote any of the businesses, any businesses really.., because at the end of the day, the more you have to offer in a place, the better it is overall' (interviewee C). Another entrepreneur located in a village approximately 6 miles from Westport said 'It's just to try and get people talking the Mayo story. Whether they come to here or come to Westport that's absolutely fine and I don't mind that at all. Because maybe they'll come out and cycle the greenway or cycle past us and come in for a bit of lunch and think.. It's nice here so maybe we'll come back the next time. And we'll all get our share of the pie eventually..I think [business] should be shared around everybody and everybody will eventually benefit' (interviewee S).

The challenge is to co-operate with the appropriate people. A number of people noted that a key factor in the success of Westport is the attitude of the community and businesses and the level of cooperation, for example 'we've a very good co-operative spirit among the players, the actors'. A number of members of Destination Westport who were interviewed spoke of the fact that it was made up of like minded people: one interviewee states, 'we've been lucky that 'we've been able to get so many like minded people sitting around a table that have a similar vision. Now we won't agree all the time but in broad terms we have a similar vision of how we want the town to be marketed, the type of customer you want, and how we want to progress things for the future'. It is this common vision that encourages entrepreneurs to look beyond just their own businesses and to see how their success is entwined with the success of the destination.

### **3.4 How does this cooperation emerge?**

Rural locations where people know each other may create an advantage in terms of the initiation and sustaining of cooperation. When asked how did cooperation start, the importance of knowing each other professionally or personally is evident. This reflects Beritelli's (2011, p.23) finding that 'cooperative behavior among actors and stakeholder groups in tourism destinations is an interpersonal business.. it is not based on clinical games and does not follow pure rational theoretic principles'. It is interesting to note that few began co-operating as a result of funding requirements or because they were encouraged by local authorities thus implying that the cooperation emerges from individuals and their own relationships and so are very much embedded in the local area and initiated by local entrepreneurs. These relationships can be personal or can take a variety of different professional forms. From knowing each other professionally to the connection being between the organizations of the individuals, to being part of a broader network. Each of these, although similar, involve a different nature of relationship for example one focused on a relationship between individuals to another which is a relationship based on organizational rather than individual linkages.(Insert figure 4 approximately here)

The Greenway in Mayo is a good example of this. The Greenway is a 42km walking and cycle way which has been developed as a result of state funding and a co-operative approach by the Department of Transport, Fáilte Ireland, Mayo County Council and the project has meant that rather than selling their land, or the state engaging in compulsory purchasing of land, local landowners allow users to access the route via their land. The direct expenditure in the local area as a result of the Greenway in 2011 was estimated to be €7.2 million (Fitzpatrick, 2011). But in addition to this increased spend in the area, the emergence of the Greenway has also acted as a catalyst for local development and

entrepreneurial activity. This can be seen extremely clearly in the case of Mulranny which is a small village on the route. In 2009 Mulranny engaged in a community futures process and the result was a 20 point plan and the establishment of a number of committees. The tourism committee has been quite active and 'it's really got accommodation providers working together', they now have a website for the area and they opened a tourism office which is totally run by volunteers seven days a week for three months of the year. Mulranny was awarded the Eden European destination of excellence for last year in Ireland' and this reflects the work that the community and entrepreneurs have undertaken in the last three years.

The opening of the Greenway created lots of opportunities for entrepreneurs in Mulranny and in particular one hotel has used it to significantly change and develop its business – 'I've gone past this thing of staying two nights and one diner, We are not that anymore, I feel that we are trying to be an experiential tourist place.. so you come along and you check in and ...we give you things to do on a daily basis'. This involves linking in with other providers in the area and they do this with artists, museums, walking trips, history talks, storytelling and farm visits. To develop this idea of becoming a destination resort has required cooperation with other local businesses so this is another example of how success for the tourism business is intertwined with success of other local businesses. The Gourmet Greenway emerged from the hotel. The hotel had had a good reputation for food and had been in the Bridgestown guide, (an annually produced guide to the best places to eat in Ireland) but in 2009/10 it was not included as the chef had moved to another hotel. To ensure that the hotel retained a reputation for food they came up with the Gourmet Greenway idea, it began with just a gourmet greenway night with a nine course tasting menu and they brought down a famous Irish food critic but this had now developed into a more long term strategy. There are now 11 businesses that are part of the Gourmet Greenway

(<http://www.discoverireland.ie/DI/media/DiscoverIreland/Places%20to%20Go/Westport/PDFs/1835GourmetGreenway.pdf> ). Although the hotel initiated the idea they say that 'we see this not as us dictating to them but a partnership between us all. We happen to drive it, as in the marketing of it and whatever else'. This relationship involves buying from each other, meeting about twice a year, the hotel sending its guests to visit, the development of a brochure, the organization of a Gourmet dinner once a year, and a gourmet greenway week when people come and do tours of the area.

This example of entrepreneurial cooperation has resulted in increased profits for the businesses involved - in the hotel referral and repeat business used to be about 50% but it's now up to 70% and this is because 'every time people come back there's something else for them to do'. This cooperation has in many ways emerged as a result of local development in the area initiated by local government as it generated new opportunities as local entrepreneurs became more aware of those who were located nearby along the greenway.

#### **4. Discussion**

This research indicates a more complex picture of rural tourism entrepreneurs as individuals who are motivated by profits and growing their businesses but are also extremely conscious of their local area and recognize that their survival and success is embedded in the survival and success of the destination. As discussed above, this recognition is apparent in terms of their motivation to co-operate with other local businesses and their choice of who to co-operate with.

The traditional view of an entrepreneur is as a person who runs a business that is impacted by the local area and who have an impact on the local area. This happens in ways such as the business brings money into the local economy and creates jobs, and the local environment impacts businesses in terms of laws and regulations and perhaps customers for the business, as such the businesses operate within their own 'bubbles' inside the local area. But the relationship between an entrepreneur and a local area is much more complex than that. In particular in the case of rural entrepreneurs they are usually members of the community and of course the local area is often their home. Thus it becomes less like an external environment for which they have no concern, from a personal point of view they are attached to the place. This is identified in Hallak et al (2012) research which shows that place identity for an entrepreneur is related to their entrepreneurial self-efficacy and by Kline and Miliburn (2010) who outline ways in which communities can create a supportive environment for entrepreneurs. While it is important that this connection between the entrepreneur and the place is identified in the literature to date, in some ways it is still portrayed as a one way relationship whereby the place can have a positive impact on the entrepreneur's success. This research takes this idea one step further as it shows that the entrepreneur can be motivated by a desire to have a positive impact on the place by engaging in activities that are good for the area. This may include working with other business owners and the community, being part of local committees, engaging in marketing of the destination and referring guests/tourists to others in the area. The traditional view of the entrepreneur would see such actions as only being undertaken if there is a benefit for the entrepreneur but this research shows that sometimes the benefit for the individual may not be readily apparent and yet as there are benefits for the destination as a whole this activity is undertaken nonetheless.

In addition to this rural tourism entrepreneurs have connections with other businesses either professionally or socially. This creates a social milieu whereby there is something that links the community (including entrepreneurs) together. This recognition of the connections that exist between entrepreneurs shows that the relationship between the entrepreneurs and the area is rooted in connections between individuals, entrepreneurs and community members. As such these businesses are rooted in the local area rather than floating within this space. It is this that explains their attitudes to cooperation and the importance of the local area when they make their business decisions.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper is not arguing that profits do not matter, rather it starts at the same point that the discussion of lifestyle entrepreneurs and profits has perhaps ended, profits matter as they are needed to sustain the business but other factors can also be important. Rural tourism entrepreneurs are embedded in their local area and the success of the local area is also important to them and they will implement strategy on this basis. This is why they are often heavily involved in local committees and activities. Could it be argued though that they are only concerned with the local area in as much as it can benefit them, so they are interested in sponsoring festivals for example only if it will bring in the type of tourists who will stay in their accommodation? While this may well be the case for some entrepreneurs, it is not always that simple, as for example in the case of Destination Westport and the Gourmet Greenway the focus appears to be on the development of the place as an attractive destination and as shown above they recognize, and are aware, that the return that their particular business gets may come in the future, or may even come when their children have taken over the business. Perhaps this attitude is also supported by strong community collaborative activity around groups such as Tidy Towns and also the positive perception of Westport in particular as a place to live and visit. Furthermore the important role of local government in terms of initiating and driving the Greenway idea must also be noted. Thus this particular area perhaps has an environment and history which is conducive to such cooperation.

The key role that entrepreneurs have played in the development of destinations is evident in terms of projects such as Gourmet Greenway and Destination Westport. The economic effect of the Greenway for example is shown in terms of an increase in direct spending in the area and increased tourist numbers (Failte Ireland, 2011), but what this research has also shown is the spin off effect in terms of actions of individual entrepreneurs and the emergence of new businesses and products. Thus it is clear that rural tourism entrepreneurs play an important role in the development of destinations. What this paper has shown is that this positive impact on the destination as a whole is not just a lucky side effect of the entrepreneurs attempting to increase their profits, instead it is as a result of these entrepreneurs making decisions based not just on what is good for their business in terms of profits and market share today but in terms of the area as a whole, and a desire to ensure the future sustainability of the destination. This challenges us to view entrepreneurs in a different way than we may have heretofore.

In addition there are policy implications of this finding as it shows that if organizations such as tourism bodies or local government are trying to encourage entrepreneurs to co-operate, the argument that it is good for the local area could be a persuasive one, even if increases to individual businesses profits cannot be assured in the short-term. This extends Beritelli's (2011) point that 'in order to increase cooperation or launch collective action, planners must pay attention to previously installed bonds of trust and understanding among actors'. In this study it is notable that trust isn't specifically highlighted as a key issue in either the surveys or the interviews. It seems though that the concept of trust is embodied in other factors, such as being neighbours and friends, liking those who they cooperate with, working well together. Thus the focus is on the bonds and understanding between actors and these bonds can be created by trust, but this trust can also be an almost implicit part of the relationship which has often developed over time and in a personal capacity. It is also notable that, as discussed above, the particular nature of community relations in a place can have a positive impact on decisions to cooperate from a business perspective, so communities working together on projects such as Tidy Towns creates a bond between people in the community and also between the community and the town itself as they feel a greater sense of pride and commitment to the place.

This research has informed and enriched our understanding about rural tourism entrepreneurs and it challenges us to think of them not as individuals who just happen to be located in this area and utilize its resources but as important elements which are the very anchors of the destination and which firmly constitute what the destination is and mould and regenerate it. Theories such as Richie and Crouch (2003, 2007) identify the role of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurialism as important players in terms of harnessing resources and creating tourism products, but the implicit assumption is that they are doing this in order to maximize their profits. This research shows that they also take decisions not just on the basis of profits but they are also cognizant of the impact their actions will have on the destination and take deliberate actions to have a positive effect on their local area. Thus these entrepreneurs are not just leveraging the resources in the destination for their own personal financial gain and 'giving' back to the area in terms of employment and income. The relationship between the rural tourism entrepreneurs and their local area is more complex than that as they are often motivated by the desire to develop the destination and this can work in tandem with their desire for profits, but can also supersede the immediate need to gain profits as they are willing to engage in cooperation for the good of the destination in the expectation that eventually this will benefit their business. Rural tourism entrepreneurs make decisions regarding cooperating with other firms on the basis of how it will affect their business, but also on the basis of how it will impact their destination. Thus our analysis and discussion of motivations of rural tourism entrepreneurs must include consideration of the importance of the local area or destination.

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